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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 BANGKOK 000340

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TAGS: [PREL](#) [PGOV](#) [TH](#)

SUBJECT: THAILAND: GOVERNMENT PREPARES FOR THE LATEST
"FINAL BATTLE" AS CRACKS EMERGE IN RED-SHIRT FACADE

REF: A. BANGKOK 0319 (AMBASSADOR MEETS BANHARN)
[1](#)B. BANGKOK 0184 (SEH DAENG HOUSE RAID)
[1](#)C. BANGKOK 0149 (RED-SHIRT CORE LEADERS GOALS)
[1](#)D. 09 BANGKOK 3067 (RED-SHIRTS SET THEIR SIGHTS)

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Classified By: DCM JAMES F. ENTWISTLE, REASON 1.4 (B) AND (D)

[1](#)1. (SBU) Summary: Posturing and positioning ahead of the latest "final battle" promised by anti-government red-shirt activists at the end of the month picked up pace the first week of February, as larger cracks emerged within the pro-Thaksin camp. Finance Minister Korn told Ambassador February 4 that the government was worried about the possibility of violence, and Foreign Minister Kasit briefed the diplomatic corps February 5 on government preparations. Core agitators MGEN Khattiya (aka "Seh Daeng") and MGEN (ret.) Panlop returned from a meeting with fugitive former PM Thaksin in Dubai to announce on February 4 that they would form a civilian army as part of a final push to oust the current government. The next day Puea Thai Chair Chavalit strongly denied that he would have any role, and United Front for Democracy Against Dictatorship (UDD) leaders denounced Panlop, leading Panlop to declare that he would no longer be associated with the red-shirt movement. Separately, Puea Thai parliamentary leader Chalerm squabbled with banned politician Sudarat over control of party personnel and tactics.

[1](#)2. (C) Comment: As the February 26 court decision on Thaksin's assets draws closer, there are growing indications the red-shirts are trying to influence the decision-making process through intimidation, while simultaneously laying the groundwork for trouble should the court decision go against Thaksin. We have long urged red-shirt leaders to distance themselves publicly from the actions and rhetoric of Khattiya, yet ultimately it is Thaksin who calls the shots, and he continues to summon various UDD leaders to meetings in conjunction with Khattiya and Panlop. Public pronouncements by Chavalit and UDD core leaders like Jatuporn saying they do not support Seh Daeng and/or Panlop and the violent measures those men espouse are helpful but ultimately beside the point. Thaksin's willingness to be photographed with those who embrace violence suggests a willingness to condone their methods as long as it suits his purposes. End Summary and Comment.

GOVERNMENT PREPARING FOR CONFRONTATION...

13. (C) Finance Minister Korn Chatikavanij told the Ambassador on February 4 that February would be critical, underscoring the need for vigilance in the face of red-shirt mobilization.

It was important for the government to maintain control of any red-shirt activities to avoid chaos and forestall intervention by the military, Korn said, but if necessary the Royal Thai Army (RTA) would deploy under the Internal Security Act (ISA) to keep the situation under control. Korn expressed hope that even if Thaksin would not abandon his political efforts, his financial and political capital would decline over time; the proper way to contest for power was through the parliament and the next election cycle, which he suggested would take place in 2011. Ambassador responded that the USG reaction would be harsher than in 2006 were there to be another coup, but that deployment of the military under the ISA, under civilian control, and without the use of excessive force, was different.

14. (C) On February 5 at a diplomatic corps briefing, Foreign Minister Kasit Piromya outlined efforts the government had already undertaken to prepare for any eventuality during the February 17-28 period. In anticipation of the protests, the Cabinet had already activated the portions of the ISA that permit the RTA to work with the Royal Thai Police (RTP) to maintain peace. MGEN Thitiwan Kamlang-ek from the Thai National Security Council added that there would be no military coup and that the RTA would not allow a repeat of the social disorder that occurred in April 2009. 780 key red-shirt activists were already under surveillance, MGEN Thitiwan said, so the government could act first to head off

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any problems. Kasit said a "war room" to coordinate the government's efforts would be set up at RTA headquarters in Bangkok, and movement into Bangkok from the provinces would be restricted on the day the court reads the verdict on Thaksin's assets case.

...AS RIFTS IN THE RED-SHIRT CAMP EMERGE

15. (SBU) Two of the top pro-Thaksin agitators known for use of violence -- former deputy commander of the Internal Security Operations Command (ISOC) MGEN (ret.) Panlop Pinmanee and suspended Army adviser MGEN Khattiya Sawasdipol, aka "Seh Daeng" -- confirmed that they visited former Prime Minister Thaksin in Dubai February 1; Khattiya posted a group photo on his website indicating that the other two participants were the most radical of the UDD leaders, Pattaya riot leader Arisman Pongruangrong and Suphon Attawong, aka "Rambo Isaan." Khattiya and Panlop told the media they would form a "National Army of Thai People for Democracy under the Name of the King" and suggested Puea Thai Chairman GEN Chavalit Yongchaiyut would serve as Supreme Commander. Seh Daeng claimed that Thaksin had given the group the green light to make an all-out, last-ditch push against the government if the House was not dissolved and the 1997 Constitution failed to be restored.

16. (SBU) Faced with an immediate negative reaction to the "red army" proposal, key figures in Puea Thai and the UDD reacted swiftly to try and distance themselves from Panlop and Seh Daeng. Puea Thai Chair Chavalit denied that he would have a role in leading any type of group against the government, insisting that he had returned to politics to seek peaceful political change. Jatuporn Prompan, one of the UDD core leaders, said the UDD had not sanctioned the creation of an army, armed or unarmed. Panlop responded to Chavalit and Jatuporn's public disembrace by saying he would no longer be associated with the red-shirt movement, yet warning that violence was still a possibility.

17. (SBU) The rift between Panlop and Seh Daeng and UDD and Puea Thai came right on the heels of a spat between two pro-Thaksin politicians. Chalerm Yubamrung, head of the Puea Thai MP caucus, publicly accused banned Thai Rak Thai (TRT) executive Sudarat Keyuraphan, long seen as head of the Bangkok bloc of pro-Thaksin MPs, of meddling in party affairs generally and blocking his career specifically. Chalerm alleged that Sudarat had slandered him and disrupted the political career of his three sons. The two reportedly resolved their differences at a Puea Thai party meeting on February 2.

18. (C) Meanwhile, Thaksin appeared to be putting all his options on the table as the February 26 court verdict approached. Our soundings suggest anything could happen with the verdict, with some contacts convinced the court will strip Thaksin of everything, while others, such as former PM Banharn (REF A), confident the court would show him some leniency. Many interpreted Thaksin's February 1 meeting with his more radical lieutenants as evidence that Thaksin was preparing to instigate serious trouble in an effort to bully the courts and government into a favorable ruling, or to spark an overreaction in the case of red-shirt disturbances in the wake of any decision against Thaksin.

JOHN